(e) if so, whether Government are considering the proposal; and

(f) the present status on the issue?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T. R. BAALU): (a) to (0 At present, there are four Maritime Training Institutes running under Indian Institute of Maritime Studies, Mumbai *viz.* Lal Bahadur Shastri College of Advanced Maritime Studies and Research, Mumbai; Training Ship Chanakya, Navi Mumbai; Marine Engineering and Research Institute, Kolkata and Marine Engineering and Research Institute, Mumbai. The Government of India received requests from some States including that of Gujarat for setting up of Maritime Universities in their States. However, action for setting up an Indian Maritime University at Chennai with regional campuses at Kolkata, Mumbai and Visakhapatnam as announced by Hon'ble Finance Minister in his budget speech (2006-07) is under way.

Maritime inspection agencies

1739. DR. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any proposals to allow the formation of new Shipping and Maritime Inspection Agencies all over the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the details of bottlenecks identified with regard to the Mercantile Maritime Department;

(d) the steps taken to encourage shipping by allowing the expansion of Maritime Inspection Agencies; and

(e) the steps taken to modernise all agencies under the charge of DG shipping and streamlining them.

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T. R. BAALU): (a) to (e) There is no proposal at present with the Government to allow the formation of new Shipping and Maritime Inspection Agencies all over the country. There has been increasing workload on Mercantile Marine Departments due to expansion in the ocean going fleet, off shore vessels, fishing craft etc. and manifold increase in international codes to regulate shipping such as the introduction of maritime pollution prevention requirements, flag state and

Port State Control Inspections. Government have recently opened two new Regional Offices of Mercantile Marine Departments at Cochin and Kandla and three new District level offices at New Manglore, Paradip and Haldia. A number of steps including e-governance, delegation of enhanced powers, issuance of no objection certificates for deep sea fishing vessels at central level and setting up of grievances cells have been taken to modernise and streamline the offices of Mercantile Marine Departments under the Directorate General of Shipping, Mumbai.

Damage to heritage bridge due to Sethusamudram Channel Project

†1740. SHRI SHREEGOPAL VYAS: Will the Minister of SHIPPING ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether collaboration of the foreign companies is being sought in the Sethusamudram Channel Project near Rameshwaram;

(b) if so, whether an ancient heritage bridge which exists there and which has been confirmed to be touching Lanka, would be affected therefrom; and

(c) if so, the steps being taken by Government for protecting this heritage?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T. R. BAALU): (a) As such, collaboration from foreign companies is not being sought in the Sethusamudram Ship Channel Project (SSCP) near Rameshwaram; however, a Memorandum of Understanding has been entered into between the Suez Canal Anthority, Egypt and Sethusamudram Corporation Limited, India on mutual cooperation in the area of construction, operation and management of the ship channel.

(b) No scientific evidence has been found by the project authorities for the existence of man-made structure in Adam's Bridge area during sub-soil investigations undertaken by four different agencies upto a limited depth required for planning the project during the period 2001 to 2006.

(c) Does not arise.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.